



Netwatch

By Jim Carroll

Your guide to business & accounting on the Internet

Master of your domain

As accountants, we are responsible for protecting corporate assets or, in an audit situation, ensuring our clients have put in place proper control over their assets. And yet, we may not include in that responsibility one very critical asset: the corporate Internet domain name.

What if your corporate domain name disappears? It could happen very easily — if your annual domain renewal fee is not paid on time — with disastrous results. Some “enterprising” individuals have developed automated systems that regularly watch for the expiry of domain names, and as soon as one expires they pounce — registering it under their own name. Then they’ll put up a porn site and send you an e-mail indicating they would be pleased to sell the name back to you for an outrageous fee.

It’s a sophisticated form of blackmail, but it does not violate current international rules. You may be able to win back the domain name under trademark law, but that will take time. In the meantime, your customers are seeing something much different when

they visit your website — any e-commerce you have established comes to an abrupt halt.

So how do you go about protecting your corporate domain names? Start off as any accountant would. First, do an inventory and assign ownership for the asset to someone in the financial department. (Some businesses discover they have many different domain names registered, and assignment and responsibility may be scattered all over the organization.) Second, compile a list of expiry dates. You can determine this by using WHOIS tools at such Internet registration authorities as VeriSign and OpenSRS, which allow you to look up domain name ownership records. In doing so, make sure you are the legal owner of each domain.

Third, consider consolidating your domain names. While domain registration authorities are a dime a dozen, there are also services such as EasyDNS, which

let you manage hundreds of domain names in one place. You can, for example, link several domain names to one site, redirect e-mail for particular domains or do a variety of other activities to enhance your online presence.

(You can also use the service on a personal basis — if you have free Web space as part of your Internet service, you can use EasyDNS to set up a domain name that will use that space. Users will see your chosen domain name, rather than an ugly domain name based upon your ISP’s address.)

Fourth, beware of domain slamming where unethical organizations mail out thousands of domain name “renewal notices.” If you send the form back, your domain name, or its ownership, could be switched. To learn more, read the EasyDNS document on the practice.

Finally, acquaint yourself with some other domain management tools. Interested in determining if various domains related to a certain word or phrase are available? Try the MultiWHOIS tool at DomainWizard or the Domainator. What about potential trademark infringements on your domain name? Take a look at the NameGuard service at NameProtect. Whatever the case may be, the important thing is you recognize that domain names are a critical corporate asset and should be treated with the respect they deserve.

Jim Carroll, FCA, is a well-known speaker, author and columnist. Reach him at jcarroll@jimcarroll.com or log on to his website at www.jimcarroll.com

DOMAIN NAME MANAGEMENT

VeriSign WHOIS

www.netsol.com/cgi-bin/whois/whois

OpenSRS WHOIS www.opensrs.net

EasyDNS www.easydns.com

DomainWizard www.dwizard.net

Domainator <http://www.e-gineer.com/domainator/index.phtml>

NameProtect www.nameprotect.com